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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3057

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 5371

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3099

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2964

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3615

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000812

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ECON EPET SOCI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: TANKER FIRE AT LOCAL GAS STATION

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY: On June 25, a spark caused a gasoline tanker truck fire at a gas station near the 11th Microdistrict of Ashgabat. More than 15 tons of gasoline (approximately 4,995 gallons) was drained from the burning tanker to prevent an explosion. No injuries were reported in the incident. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (U) On June 25 at approximately 1500, rumors began to spread that a gas pump exploded at the new gas station near the 11th Microdistrict of Ashgabat, one of five new gas stations that were built by Turkish companies and put into operation on October ¶2008. During the afternoon, Embassy Motorpool drivers saw a cloud of smoke rising from the east side of the city, close to the area where the gas station was located. The operations at the new gas stations, including storage of gasoline and fueling, are computer operated and offer card payment options. The new gas station near the 11th Microdistrict was built next to an old one, and both gas stations continue to operate.

¶4. (U) An Embassy Locally Employed Staff, who lives in the 11th Microdistrict, reported that he did not observe any signs of an explosion when he passed by the gas station later in the evening on that day. The gasoline pumps, as well a shop and car wash station, had no indications of damage caused by fire. However, the gas station area was blocked off by security tape and entrance was limited to authorized personnel only. Numerous private and government vehicles were parked along the street, outside the gas station. No cars, except for a couple of trucks (including one street cleaning truck and a fire truck) were parked behind the security line. Several government officials and law enforcement officers were standing near the gas pumps at the gas station. Gasoline had drained down the street for a mile and street cleaners were in place

cleaning the fuel from the street.

15. (U) A fuel attendant at the neighboring gas station recounted that a spark had ignited a fire on a gasoline tanker truck at the gas station. To avoid an explosion of the loaded fuel tank, the tank's faucets were opened and the gasoline was drained on the ground. Firefighters arrived at the scene and extinguished the fire, although by that time most of the gasoline had already poured out of the tank. The fuel attendant claimed that nobody was injured. The Chinese-made tanker truck held 17 tons of gasoline (approximately 5,660 gallons). Reportedly, 15 tons of gasoline (approximately 4,995 gallons) were poured on the ground.

16. (U) COMMENT: Nothing was mentioned about the incident in the local media, but the word of mouth spread immediately. Lines at other gas stations in Ashgabat were longer than usual on the same and following days. Many rushed to fill up their cars in case the government decided to close all the gas stations for fire safety checks or increase prices for gasoline to reimburse the incurred losses. Neither of these actions has happened yet, although the gas station near 11th Microdistrict is still closed for repair.  
END COMMENT.

MILES